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DANNI WILLIAMS

BOWL RECAP

AND MORE...

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BY ROB HAVENS '88

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On the Cover: Texas A&M signs another stellar football class. From the time they started the recruiting process, the class referred to themselves as the #GigEmGang17. Seven members of the class pictured on the cover are (starting at the bottom left corner, moving clockwise) Keynel McZeal, Ondario Robinson, Jhamon Ausbon, Kellen Mond, Tyree Johnson, Camron Horry, Jacob Kibodi.

Photos courtesy of Janis Ryan, Tim Walter, Tiffany Tompkins/Bradenton Herald, Larry French/St. John's College High School, Mishelle Keverline, FamilyFocusImaging.com.

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Howdy Ags!

It's spring in Aggieland and that means the start of Aggie Baseball! I will always have a fond place in my heart for Texas A&M Baseball because they played a huge part in me coming back to College Station.

When I got married and started raising a family, I was living in Lubbock, where I grew up. As you can imagine it's hard to raise Aggies in Lubbock. So when we would travel back to College Station to see football games at least once a year, I would try to convince my wife to let us move here. She would always tell me no.

So about ten years ago I had a boys trip with my two oldest sons to watch a baseball series vs. Okie St. We spent three days watching Aggie Baseball and touring around Aggieland. They fell in love with it and said, "Daddy, we want to live here!" I responded, "Tell your mom!"

When we returned, they went on and on to their mom about how much fun they had and asked if we could move here. And for the first time in 16 years she said, "We can pray about it." Fortunately, God answered those prayers and we moved to College Station soon after that.

We have loved raising our boys in College Station! They got to go to all the different sports, learn all about the traditions and fall in love with Texas A&M, as I did. Now they both attend A&M, one is a senior, the other is a freshman and our third son will be class of 2027!

I can't go to an Aggie Baseball game without thinking about how instrumental it was in bringing my family and I home to Aggieland. I'm looking forward to another season and we wish Coach Childress and his team good luck. One of our favorite family vacations was a trip to Omaha to watch our Aggies play. Let's hope we can have another one this summer!

Gig'em Ags!

Rob '88



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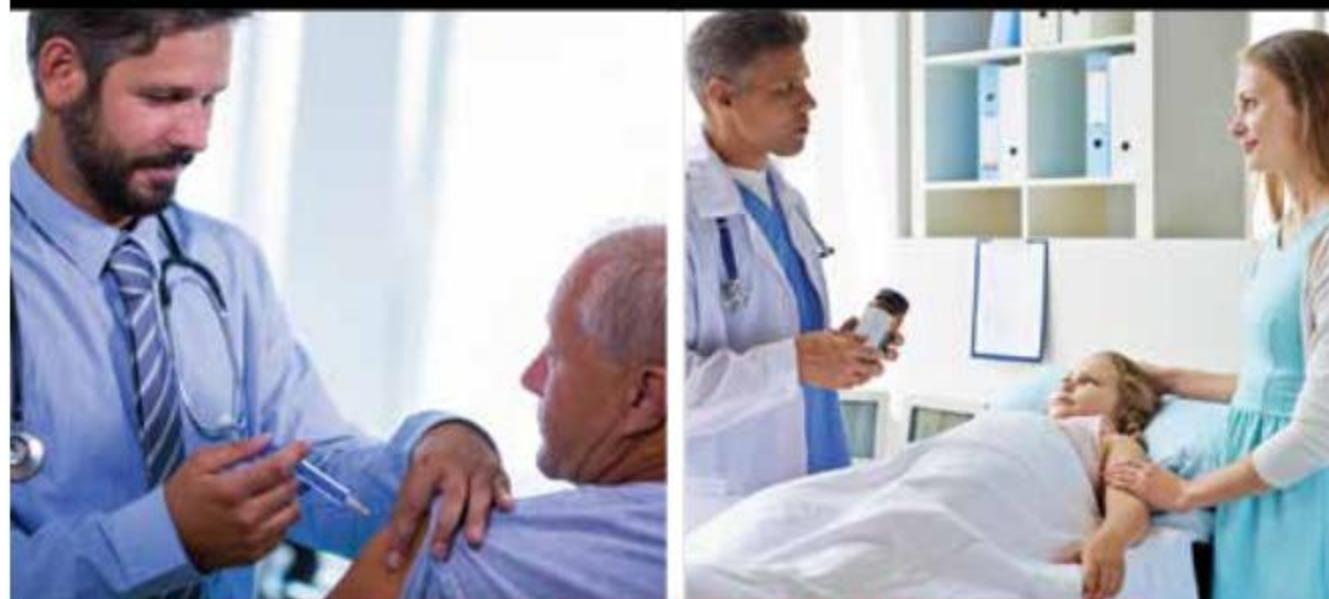


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snapshot



all in...

Texas A&M Baseball showed once again how important it is to give back.

They raised over \$17,000 for VS. Cancer Foundation to aid in the fight against pediatric cancer. Their fundraising effort culminates on the final day when the whole team, including the coaching staff, shave their heads to show their support and demonstrate their "all in" mentality to help these kids. Freshman pitcher John Kutac grimaces as he gets his head shaved but said, "It's a great cause" and he was happy to participate.

Photo by Rob Havens '88.



snapshot





opening night...

The 12th Man came by the masses to see the Aggies take the field on the first night of the season. A record-breaking crowd of 7,209 watched the Aggies blast Bowling Green 15-1. It was the biggest crowd to see the opener since the park was renovated prior to the 2012 season. The team did not disappoint, as they scored early and often with a new lineup that displayed the youth and talent that Coach Childress and his staff have assembled.

Photo by Rob Havens '88.





solong myles garrett...

"Parting is such sweet sorrow..." On New Year's Eve, Garrett announced his intentions to forego his senior year and enter the 2017 NFL Draft. It was news we all expected, but it was still difficult to hear. Myles has been a class act since arriving on campus and will go down in history as one of the best players to ever don the maroon and white. We wish you the best, Myles!

Photo by Rob Havens '88.



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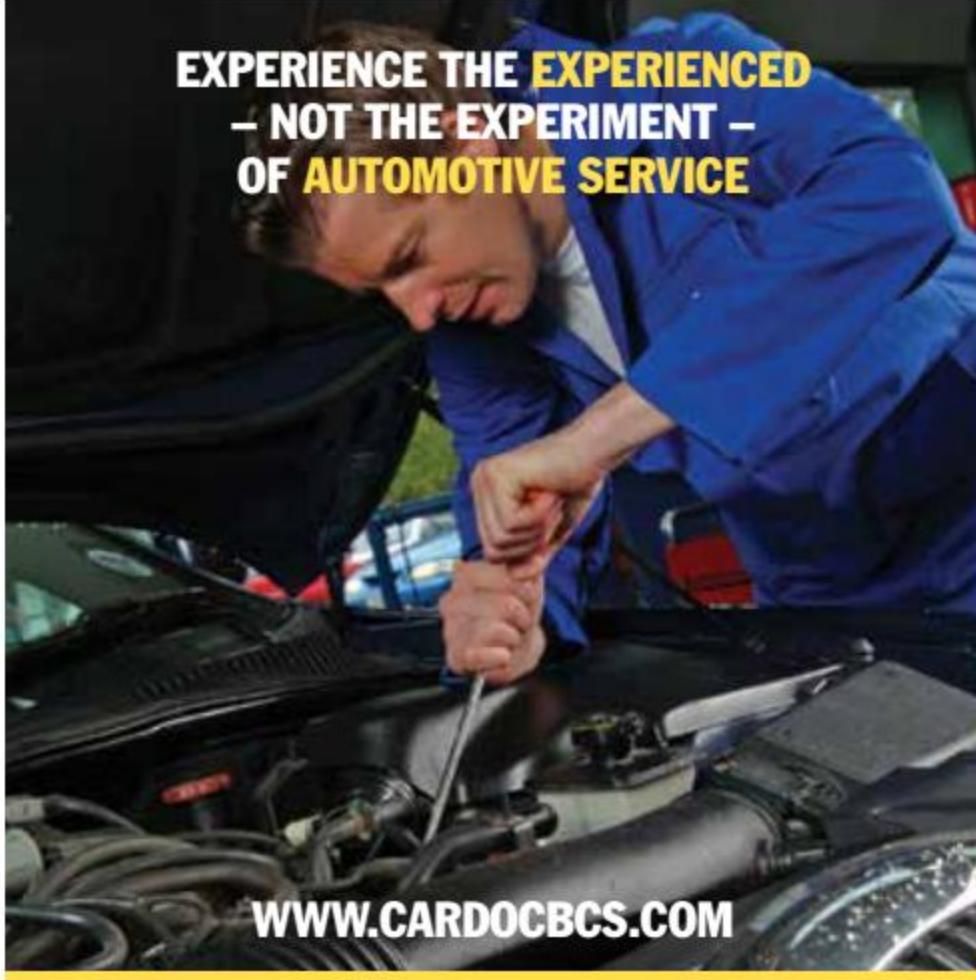
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scoreboard



[women's tennis]

Texas A&M Women's Tennis opened the season 5-0 for the first time since 2002 and qualified for the ITA National Women's Team Indoor Championship. The Aggies fell to #3 Pepperdine in the first round and then beat #10 Duke in round two of the prestigious event. Although the Aggies went on to lose to Michigan in the third round, the girls showed a tremendous amount of fight and proved they belong among the best in the country.



[men's tennis] Aggie tennis is nearing the end of their non-conference schedule. After a tough start, the Aggies have rebounded with two wins and now they will compete against three teams in Florida and then on to South Carolina before returning home to the friendly confines of the Mitchell Tennis Center.



[men's swimming & diving] The men's swimming and diving team had impressive wins over rival LSU and SMU heading into the SEC Championships. The men led the event after day one but wound up finishing seventh in the very competitive field.

[women's swimming & diving]

The Aggies brought back their sixth conference championship trophy in program history with a commanding win at the SEC Championships. It was the second year in a row that Steve Bultman's squad won the championship and the results were never in question as the team led the event from wire to wire. The team tallied a total of 1,304 points to out-distance the runner-up Georgia who totaled only 1,113.

scoreboard

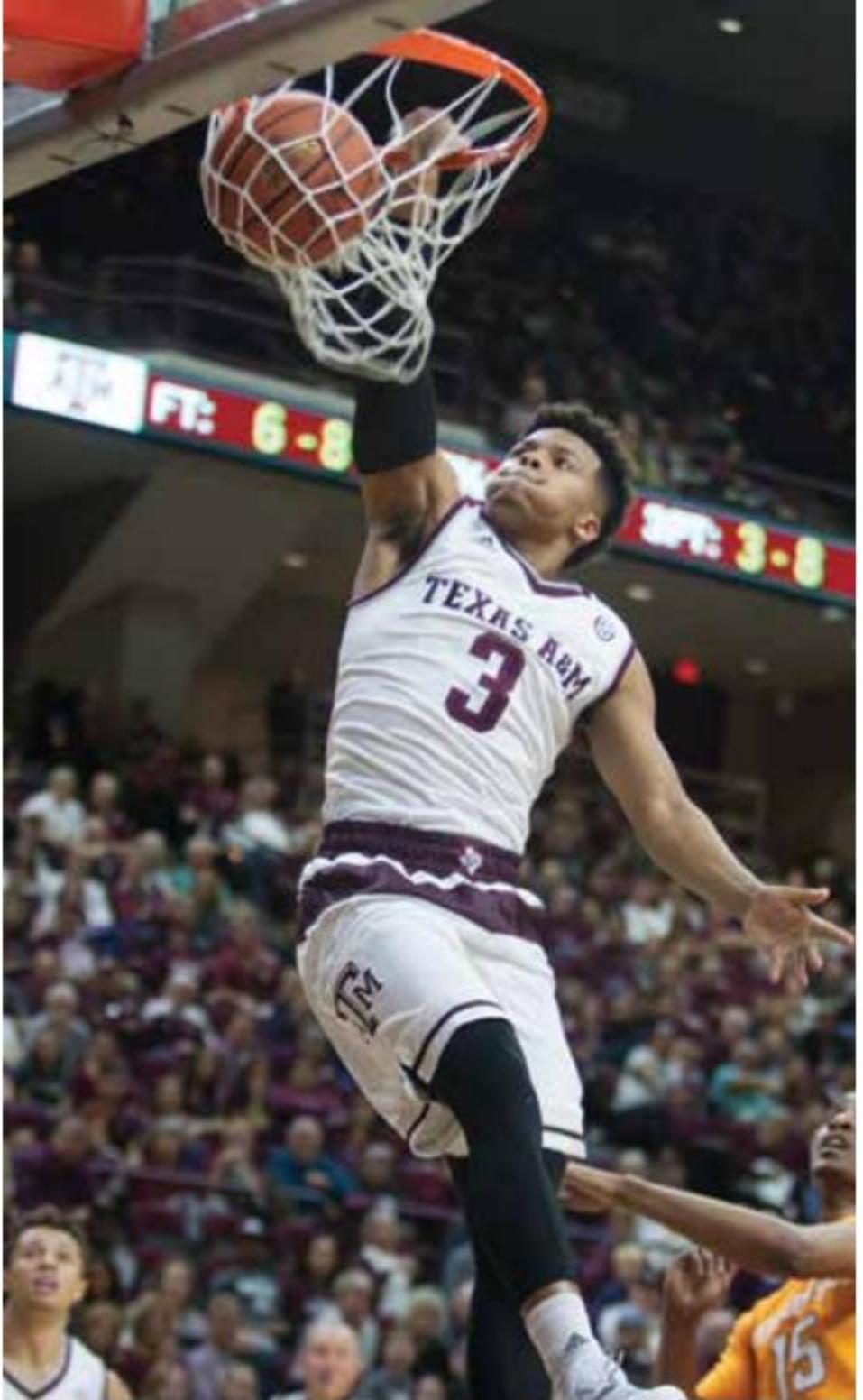


[track and field] Both the men and women's teams had very successful indoor seasons and are ready to compete in the SEC Championships in Nashville, TN. The Ags will host the NCAA Championships at Gilliam Indoor Stadium on March 10th & 11th.



[equestrian] The equestrian team is currently ranked number two in the country and are coming off of two big wins over #5 SMU and #8 South Carolina. They only have three more events before they compete in the SEC Championship. This team has the talent and the momentum to win a National Championship. They will compete in Waco April 13-15 to try and bring home a Natty for Texas A&M!



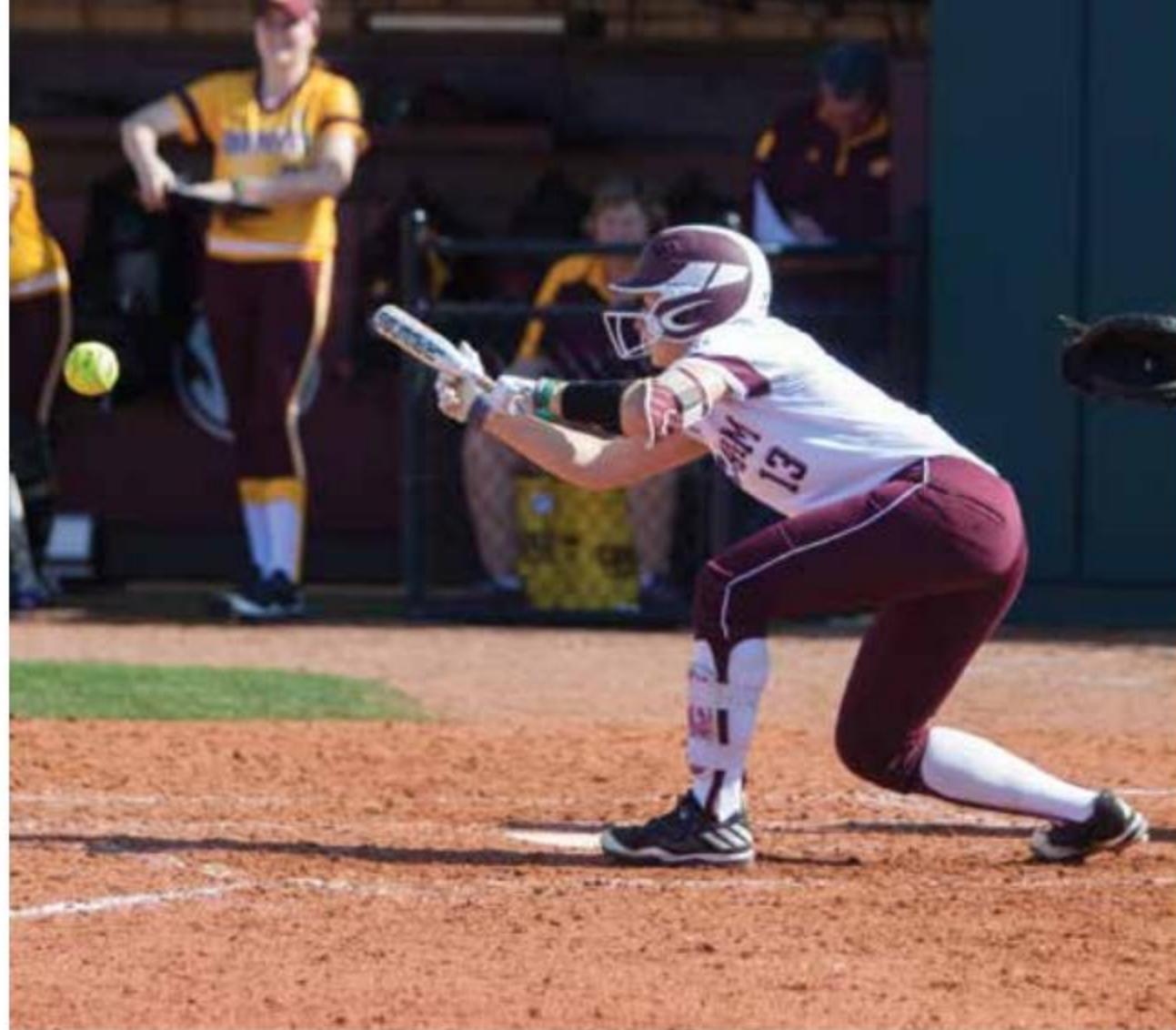


[men's basketball] It has been an up-and-down year for the men. Robert Williams has had an outstanding year, and most experts predict he could be an NBA lottery pick. DJ Hogg suffered a season ending injury, which was a devastating blow to the team. It will probably take a championship run in the SEC tourney for the squad to get a trip to the Big Dance.



[women's basketball] The Aggies have battled hard this season and competed against the best teams in the country. A big win in Tennessee and a close loss to potential #1 seed Mississippi St. at home revealed that this team could make waves in the NCAA tourney.

scoreboard



[softball] Aggie softball is ready to make it back to the College World Series. They have lots of talent and have won their first ten games. Thanks to the rebuilding year, the team has the pitching talent and bats to make some noise. So far this year they have shown a lot of grit and been able to win close games late, which can only add to their confidence level.

[baseball] Coach Childress will have a whole new lineup this year filled with young talent. Looking around the diamond you will see fresh faces at first, second, third and catcher. The team hammered Bowling Green in their first series of the year. They swept the Falcons and put 50 runs on the board in three games. The team will be playing a lot more "small ball" this season, but they have the speed and athleticism to be successful.



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2017 RECRUITING CLASS

HEZEKIAH JONES (WR)
Stafford HS

Jhamon Ausbon

POSITION WR **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 220
HIGH SCHOOL IMG Academy (Fla.)
HOMETOWN Houston, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Ausbon helped lead IMG Academy to an 11-0 record and No. 2 national ranking by grabbing 18 catches for 399 yards and five touchdowns in 2016.

Connor Blumrick

POSITION QB **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 200
HIGH SCHOOL Pearland
HOMETOWN Pearland, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Blumrick earned first-team all-district honors as a junior in 2015 after passing for nearly 1,500 yards for the Pearland Oilers.

Camron Buckley

POSITION WR **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 185
HIGH SCHOOL Cedar Hill
HOMETOWN Cedar Hill, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, ESPN, 247Sports, rated four-star recruit by Scout and Rivals

Buckley helped Cedar Hill HS to an 11-3 record with 26 catches for 380 yards and three touchdowns as a senior. As a junior, Buckley had 31 catches for 430 yards and seven scores.



MYLES JONES (CB)
Magnolia West HS

PHOTO COURTESY OF KENNETH TAUNTON, PHOTOS BY KT



DEVIN MORRIS (CB)
Caldwell HS

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALDWELL HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK STAFF



STACKING IT UP
How the Ags' 2017
recruiting class ranks
in the SEC



Keldrick Carper

POSITION ATH **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 175
HIGH SCHOOL Plain Dealing (La.)
HOMETOWN Plain Dealing, LA

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, rated three-star by 247Sports

Carper was a two-way standout grabbing 52 catches for 823 yards and seven touchdowns and rushed for 391 yards with 6 touchdowns on offense, and had 61 tackles with 4 pickoffs on defense. Also had a pair of punt return touchdowns.

Micheal Clemons

POSITION DE **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 240
HIGH SCHOOL Sachse
HOMETOWN Garland, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Rivals, 247Sports, rated four-star by ESPN

Clemons averaged five tackles per game for Cisco Junior College with 2.5 sacks and 8.5 tackles for loss in six games as a freshman in 2016.

Carson Green

POSITION OL **HEIGHT** 6'6" **WEIGHT** 272
HIGH SCHOOL Southlake Carroll
HOMETOWN Southlake, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Green was a first-team Class 6A all-state selection by the Associated Press after grading out at 98 percent in 2016 with 81 knockdowns and no QB sacks allowed.

Anthony Hines III

POSITION LB **HEIGHT** 6'3" **WEIGHT** 220
HIGH SCHOOL Plano East
HOMETOWN Plano, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports, Five-star by Scout

Hines III was a first-team Class 6A all-state selection and Defensive Player of the Year by the Associated Press after totaling 220 tackles, including 133 solo stops, with five sacks and 38 tackles for loss. He also contributed two pickoffs and five forced fumbles.

Jared Hocker

POSITION OL **HEIGHT** 6'6" **WEIGHT** 301
HIGH SCHOOL Birdville
HOMETOWN North Richland Hills, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Hocker was on Dave Campbell's Texas Football Super Team (third team).

Camron Horry

POSITION TE **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 261
HIGH SCHOOL James E. Taylor
HOMETOWN Katy, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Horry was honorable mention Class 6A all-state selection at offensive line by the Associated Press. Horry contributed 10 catches for 136 yards and a touchdown as a receiver.

Devodrick Johnson

POSITION LB **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 211
HIGH SCHOOL Kimball
HOMETOWN Dallas, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by Scout and Rivals, three-star recruit by PrepStar, ESPN, 247Sports

Johnson was versatile and Kimball's leading rusher and receiver in 2016 with 472 rushing yards and 446 receiving yards, in addition to 268 passing yards. Johnson earned first-team all-district honors at linebacker as a senior in 2016 after earning second-team recognition at quarterback as a junior.

Tyree Johnson

POSITION DE **HEIGHT** 6'4" **WEIGHT** 247
HIGH SCHOOL St. Johns College (D.C.)
HOMETOWN Washington, D.C.

RATING Three-star recruit PrepStar, Scout, ESPN, 247Sports, four-star recruit by Rivals

Johnson posted 66 tackles, including 11 sacks and 32 tackles for loss, as a senior at St. John's College in Washington D.C. He also forced a pair of fumbles and had five QB hurries.

Hezekiah Jones

POSITION WR **HEIGHT** 5'11" **WEIGHT** 168
HIGH SCHOOL Stafford
HOMETOWN Stafford, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Jones caught 36 passes for 660 yards and 14 touchdowns as a senior while leading Stafford to a 12-2 record. As a junior, Jones caught 31 passes for 481 yards and 5 touchdowns. Also a track and field standout, Jones earned six state track medals for Stafford, including the 200-meter dash state title in 2015.

Myles Jones

POSITION CB **HEIGHT** 6'4" **WEIGHT** 175
HIGH SCHOOL Magnolia West
HOMETOWN Magnolia, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by Scout, Rivals, 247Sports, three-star recruit by PrepStar and ESPN

Jones was honorable mention Class 5A all-state selection at defensive back by the Association Press after making 29 tackles with 3 interceptions and 9 passes broken up. Jones also blocked two field goal attempts and two punts on special teams.

Jacob Kibodi

POSITION RB **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 198
HIGH SCHOOL Christian Life Academy (La.)
HOMETOWN Baton Rouge, LA.

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Kibodi rushed for 1,208 yards and 12 touchdowns on 141 carries as a senior in 2016.

Santino Marchiol

POSITION LB **HEIGHT** 6'3" **WEIGHT** 224
HIGH SCHOOL IMG Academy
HOMETOWN Centennial, CO.

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, four-star recruit by Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Marchiol helped IMG Academy to an 11-0 record and a No. 2 national ranking by contributing 54 tackles, including a sack and four tackles for loss.



Keynel McZeal

POSITION TE **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 220

HIGH SCHOOL Port Neches-Groves

HOMETOWN Port Neches, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

McZeal helped Port Neches-Groves HS to an 11-2 record as a senior while grabbing 34 catches for 537 yards and seven touchdowns.

Kellen Mond

POSITION QB **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 191

HIGH SCHOOL IMG Academy (Fla.)

HOMETOWN San Antonio, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, ESPN, 247Sports, five-star recruit by Rivals

Mond set the IMG Academy season records for passing touchdowns and rushing touchdowns as a senior in 2016. Mond passed for 1,936 yards and 20 TDs and rushed for 775 yards and 18 scores. Mond was the District 26-6A Offensive MVP as a junior after passing for 1,991 yards and 26 touchdowns on 137 of 243 passing, while also rushing for nearly 900 yards.

Dan Moore Jr.

POSITION OL **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 315

HIGH SCHOOL West Brook Senior

HOMETOWN Beaumont, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Moore Jr. rated the nation's No. 47 offensive guard and rated the No. 8 in the state of Texas and No. 9 in the Midland Region.

Devin Morris

POSITION CB **HEIGHT** 6'1" **WEIGHT** 180

HIGH SCHOOL Caldwell

HOMETOWN Caldwell, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Morris was a two-way standout that contributed 40 tackles with 3 interceptions on defense and 29 catches for 580 yards and 4 touchdowns on offense as a senior in 2016.

CAMRON HARRY (TE)

James E. Taylor HS



PHOTO COURTESY OF MISHELLE KEVERLINE

Roshauud Paul

POSITION WR **HEIGHT** 6'0" **WEIGHT** 170
HIGH SCHOOL Bremond
HOMETOWN Bremond, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by Scout, Rivals, 247Sports, four-star by PrepStar and ESPN

Paul was named the 2016 Mr. Texas Football after leading Bremond HS to a 15-0 state championship. Paul passed for 2,256 yards and 24 touchdowns and rushed for nearly 3,000 yards and 55 touchdowns.



Ondario Robinson

POSITION DE **HEIGHT** 6'3" **WEIGHT** 236
HIGH SCHOOL Hutto
HOMETOWN Hutto, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Robinson was a second-team Class 6A all-state selection at defensive line by the Associated Press after making 68 tackles with 12 quarterback sacks and 18 tackles for loss as a senior in 2016. He also blocked two punts and a field goal attempt on special teams.

Joshua Rogers

POSITION DT **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 277
HIGH SCHOOL Houston Christian
HOMETOWN Houston, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Rogers produced 35 tackles, including 24 solo stops, with three quarterback sacks and 13 tackles for loss as a senior in 2016. As a junior, Rogers made 39 tackles with 13 tackles for loss.



Derrick Tucker

POSITION S **HEIGHT** 6'1" **WEIGHT** 189
HIGH SCHOOL Manvel
HOMETOWN Manvel, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Tucker helped lead Manvel HS to a 13-1 record by contributing 59 tackles and 6 interceptions as a senior in 2016.

Adrian Wolford

POSITION OL **HEIGHT** 6'4" **WEIGHT** 323
HIGH SCHOOL Meeker
HOMETOWN Meeker, OK

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Marchiol rated the No. 43 offensive guard in the nation, No. 10 in the state of Oklahoma and No. 105 in the Midlands Region.

Grayson Reed

POSITION OL **HEIGHT** 6'5" **WEIGHT** 305
HIGH SCHOOL Cypress Creek
HOMETOWN Cypress, TX

RATING Four-star recruit by PrepStar, Scout, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Reed is named PrepStar Top 350 All-American and ranked No. 233 overall national recruit.

Debione Renfro

POSITION CB **HEIGHT** 6'2" **WEIGHT** 183
HIGH SCHOOL Pearland
HOMETOWN Pearland, TX

RATING Three-star recruit by PrepStar, Rivals, ESPN, 247Sports

Renfro helped lead Pearland HS to an 8-4 record as a senior in 2016 with 48 tackles, an interception and 10 passes broken up. He also contributed a pair of punt return touchdowns.





[TEXAS BOWL: AGGIES 28, KANSAS ST. 33]

BY ROB HAVENS '88

A promising season that had the Aggies within striking distance of the College Football Playoffs came to an abrupt ending as the team lost to Kansas State in the Advocare Texas Bowl in late December. The Ags lost four of their last five games and ended the season with an 8-5 record for the third year in a row. The 12th Man had the opportunity to watch Myles Garrett, Trevor Knight and the rest of the Aggie seniors for the last time wearing maroon and white.

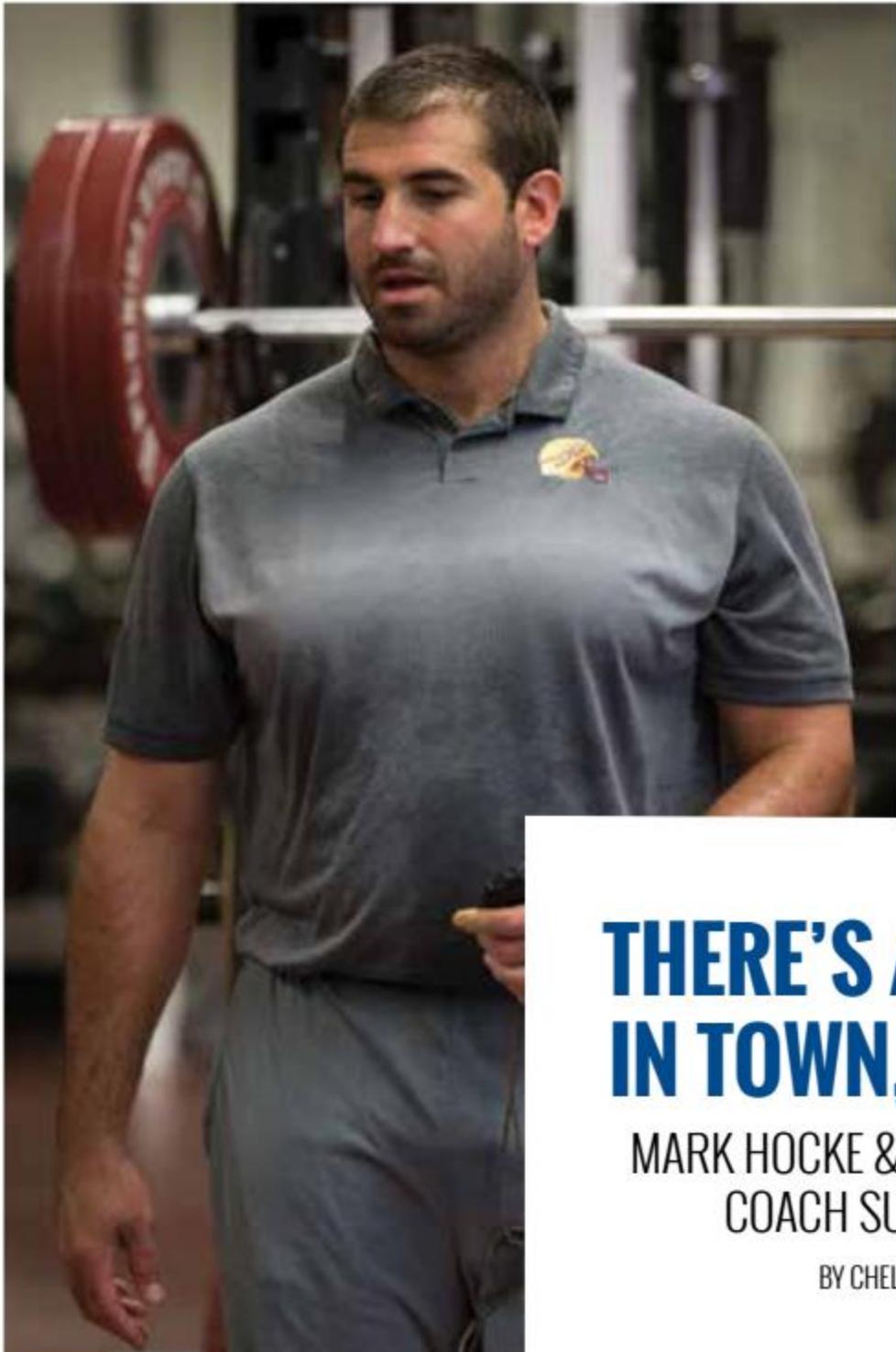
Only 12 months before, Josh Reynolds had walked into Coach Kevin Sumlin's office after a disappointing loss in the Music City Bowl and told him he would defer going into the draft and would back to play his senior season. The talented wide receiver kept his promise, had an amazing season, topping it off with a record-setting performance in his last game. Josh led the Aggies

with a Texas A&M bowl record of 12 receptions for 154 yards and two touchdowns.

Unfortunately, the Aggie defense struggled to stop the Wildcats as they controlled the ball, ate up the clock and piled up 413 yards of offense. The Ags got down by 12 but were able to fight back and were driving late in the game. A fourth down pass to Damion Ratley fell short ending the comeback and the Aggies' season.

The 2016 campaign will go down as the season of lost opportunities. The team earned a spot in the top four of the College Football Poll and a real shot at a trip to the playoffs. Hopefully, it will inspire future teams showing them what this program can achieve.





THERE'S A NEW GUY IN TOWN, OR TWO...

MARK HOCKE & RON COOPER JOIN COACH SUMLIN'S STAFF

BY CHELSEA O'NEAL '17

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING COACH

The Texas A&M Football team is looking stronger than ever thanks to the new strength and conditioning coach Mark Hocke.

After spending a year at Florida State University where he was co-associate football strength and conditioning coach, Hocke (pronounced like the sport hockey) is returning to the SEC and bringing a high energy to the Texas A&M football coaching staff.

Prior to his time at FSU, Hocke also spent a year at the University of Georgia under Mark Richt's staff and six seasons with the University of Alabama strength staff.

"Blessings rain down," Hocke tweeted on January 5, 2017, just prior to the official announcement of his hiring. "Thank you God. I owe you my everything."

After receiving his undergraduate degree from the University of New Orleans, Hocke got his start at Jesuit High School in New Orleans, Louisiana where he worked for five years as a varsity football coach as well as strength coach.

Among his long list of qualifications, Hocke is USA Weightlifting Level 1 Sports Performance Coach certified.

"There are no short cuts in becoming your best in the weight room, the field, in the classroom and in life," Hocke said after accepting his new position. "I look forward to getting started in Aggieland helping develop our student-athletes mentally, physically, spiritually and socially."

DEFENSIVE BACKS COACH

With the departure of former defensive backs coach Terry Joseph to North Carolina, the Texas A&M football coaching staff had a hole in it going into signing day.

Just one day later, a tweet by Billy Liucci broke the news that Sumlin had found the right man for the job, Ron Cooper.

Cooper, who worked alongside Chavis at LSU from 2009-2011, has plenty of SEC experience under his belt. He spent time at Mississippi State as their defensive coordinator in 2003, then at South Carolina from 2004-07 in varying roles

working with the secondary, linebackers and special teams.

Cooper was head coach at Eastern Michigan (1993-94), Louisville (1995-97) and Alabama A&M (1998-2001), compiling a 45-55 record.

After spending a year in the NFL with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Cooper returned to college football spending two years as the defensive backs coach at South Florida. Last year, Cooper served as head coach at Florida International for their final eight games of the 2016 season.

Cooper's experience will serve him well as the Aggie's will have a talented secondary team in the fall. Returning senior leaders Armani Watts and Donovan Wilson will be joined by the return of a healthy Priest Willis, who was sidelined for several games due to injury, and Justin Dunning, who missed the 2016 season to an ACL tear, in addition to the five new defensive back recruits.

No doubt, the Aggies' secondary will have a stable of talent for the 2017 season after the injury bug plagued the defensive backs on last year's squad who gave up 250 yards a game and finished 91st in the country.

DANNI WILLIAMS

COMES OFF THE BENCH AND "SHOOTS" TO THE TOP OF THE SEC!

BY ROB HAVENS '88



The expectations for great success in the 2016-2017 women's basketball season were diminished by the fact that Gary Blair had lost 74 percent of his offense to graduation. The Aggies had to replace five seniors and their top returning scorer, Khaalia Hillsman, only averaged 7.3 points a game last year. The Ags were in desperate need of a scorer and a go-to player that they could rely on to continue the success that the program has enjoyed for the last several years. Coach Blair found that saving grace player in 5'10 sophomore Danni Williams.

The talented guard from Clovis, New Mexico averaged only 3.1 points a game last year. This season she has spent the majority of the season as the top scorer in the conference. For Aggie fans that saw her in limited action last season it might be a surprise, but for Danni she always knew she could do it. "I've always been a shooter," said Williams. Last year sitting behind an All-American was tough for her because she knew she could play but this year, she feels free. "I'm just doing what I know has gotten me to this point and the coaches are letting me. Sometimes I get in trouble for not shooting the ball."

The result has the Aggies sitting at number three in the conference standings and on a four game winning streak at press time. Danni knew this season would be different for her saying, "I knew that this year it was my position to lose and I didn't want that to happen so I just went to work."

We asked Coach Blair what she has meant to the program this year and he responded, "Well, when you were averaging three points a ball game and now your averaging 17, you say who was that dumb coach that didn't play her more last year. There was an All-American in front of her. She had to wait her turn, just like it happens in any sport at any position if there is an All-American player. She took that year to get better at learning how to put the ball on the floor."

Danni has been playing basketball from the time she could walk. She had two older brothers and so while her mom, who is a nurse, was working late shifts Danni was growing up on the basketball court with her siblings and dad that coached them. As soon as she was old enough to play, she was balling.



Her supportive family might win "Aggie Parents of The Year" as the couple travels eight and a half hours from Clovis to see every home game. The proximity was important to Williams during her recruitment, as she wanted her family to be able to watch her play.

No stranger to winning, Danni is the only two time national champion on the team. She drove motocross as a kid and won National Championships as a nine and 11 year old. At one point she enjoyed it more than basketball, but had to give it up when it was obvious that basketball could earn her a scholarship in college. Aggie fans are glad that her parents helped her with that decision.

She was New Mexico's first-three time winner of the Gatorade Player of the Year Award for her basketball

prowess in high school. She also played volleyball and softball at 6A Clovis High School. With a State Championship under her belt, Danni is hungry for more championships at Texas A&M.

Williams has aspirations to become a coach when her playing days are over. It was a contributing factor when she made the decision to come to A&M. "Coach Blair has put so many players and other people in coaching positions and I feel like he could really help me with my future."

On the court, Aggie fans have fallen in love with the talented player but Blair says, "You talk about a delightful kid. It's hard for me to get mad at her; she's just too nice. She just smiles at me and says this and that. She's just a great kid."

As the season winds down the expectations for this team have changed as they have competed and beat some of the best teams in the country. We asked Danni if she felt responsible for those changes and she replied, "Kind of, but not really. I just think Coach Blair has had really good teams in the past and he makes us better. Other people are stepping up like Curyce, she's having an incredible year and Khaalia. I think people didn't see that because we weren't showing them that last year what we were capable of doing."

It's obvious that Williams's humble attitude and drive to win have been a huge part in the success of this year's team. I believe Blair has found that "go-to" player he was looking for.

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RECSPORTS

Cheer Squad Club

BY ROB HAVENS '88

One of the great things about Texas A&M Sport Clubs is that they allow students to continue competing in the sports they've played all of their lives. For Texas A&M Cheer Squad president Jennifer Kaufman, the opportunity couldn't have been more perfect. "I was not ready to give up the sport that had formed me into the driven person and athlete I am today," Kaufman said. But that wasn't all that joining the team would provide, she admitted. "I quickly learned that I would gain much more from the program than just a chance to

continue competing. I found my family within the cheer team."

The club was established in 2005 under the name "Ag Elites" and in 2009 was renamed Texas A&M Competition Squad. Finally, in 2015, the club became known as the Texas A&M Cheer Squad.

The team consists of twenty-five members, with twenty competitive members and five alternates. All of the members have prior experience from either a high school cheerleading team or an all-star cheer gym.

The club is strictly a competitive cheer team, attending competitions but not cheering at any sporting events. The team works hard in the fall to prepare for spring competitions, focusing mostly on the stunting and tumbling aspects



of cheerleading. The women compete in several events in Texas before their biggest competition of the year that takes place in Daytona, Florida at the NCA College Nationals.

Last year, the women came in second at the national competition, which was the best finish in program history. Jennifer still remembers the moments before they performed. "We were standing in a circle, listening to the songs that we had used to motivate us all year, praying, and hyping each other up. The energy in that circle was insane; there is something indescribable about being surrounded by the nineteen other girls you have spent months with, working toward the same goals, and finally arriving at the moment where we get to showcase all the blood, sweat, and tears we put into our routine."

The Texas A&M Cheer Squad has been life changing for Kaufman. Not only does she get to compete in the sport she loves, but also says that her teammates have motivated her to be a better athlete and person. "They support me in times of weakness and have made my college experience unforgettable," Kaufman said.

Men's Water Polo Club

BY ROB HAVENS '88

The Men's Water Polo Club is one of the most physically demanding sport clubs at Texas A&M. Most of us have trouble treading water for a couple of minutes, so imagine treading water while racing up and down the pool, wrestling with your opponent, and then trying to make a precision throw into a small net. The sport not only requires great physical strength, but also superior mental toughness.

The club consists of thirty-five players that make up an A team and a B team. The teams practice four days a week for two hours a day.

According to club president Billy Boone, most members played in high school and are looking to continue playing at a competitive level. "I joined because it was a combination of a lot of my favorite sports, like basketball, soccer and baseball, and I wanted to keep off the freshman 15 when I got to college," Boone told AI.

The team's main rival is Texas, and last fall the club defeated the Longhorns to advance to nationals for the first time in eight years. Boone said it was his favorite moment since joining the club. "As a senior on the team, I had to lose to them for three years in a row, which made the win that much more satisfying," Boone said.

"My favorite thing about being on the team is, without a doubt, the relationships I've made with my teammates," Boone shared. "Going through college with a group of guys you would do anything for and you know would do anything for you is something I wish everyone could experience."

Boone described that his favorite part about being club president has been having a hand in changing the team from a secondary organization to a

recognized club that people commit to and make lifelong friends from.

"The Texas A&M Men's Water Polo Club is one of the best groups of men I've ever gotten the privilege to be a part of, and having the opportunity to lead them has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life," Boone said. "It taught me invaluable leadership skills, made me a more responsible person, and has forced me to hold myself to a higher standard."



Visit recsports.tamu.edu for more info about Texas A&M Sport Clubs.

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